

TO: WKU Faculty

FROM: Ray Mendel

SUBJECT: Faculty Regent Elect Update

DATE: November 12, 1992

This is a rather lengthy letter, but I hope you will take the time to read it. I need your help if I am to be an effective faculty regent. Below I describe a) what has happened to date in my limited interactions with the Board, b) the formation, purpose, and identity of a new faculty regent advisory committee, c) my plan to meet informally with faculty in each college, d) and a new "critical incidents" data gathering initiative. The information contained herein makes rather specific requests of you.

First, let me say thank you. Thank you for the overwhelming support you gave me during the regent election. If there is a lesson I learned from the whole experience it is that sometimes throwing caution to the wind and "telling it like it is" pays off. I'd have to say I am more encouraged now than at any time during my past twenty years at Western. I am encouraged because I really sense a shift in mood within our faculty. We are beginning to *speak out more forcefully and with greater consensus* for those changes that are both long overdue and necessary to make this the best regional university it can be. A competitively compensated faculty, focused on its pedagogical responsibilities, characterized by high morale, and working with a respectful administration are essential precursors to realizing our potential as an institution. When I was seeking your vote, this was the theme of my campaign. Now that you have elected me, I will do everything in my power to see to it that we make real progress in these areas.

Real progress will require a commitment from the faculty. That commitment must be to take a more direct and active role in seeing to it that the most basic instructional needs of the university are addressed. As your representative on the Board, I absolutely will need your help. That help will take several forms. You must vote when key issues are presented to you. You must attend forums called to discuss available options if we reach an impasse on key issues. You must provide relevant data when it is requested of you. You must volunteer your professional expertise to the analysis of complex, sometimes highly technical issues as they arise. A Board that sees a faculty mobilized, united, and willing to speak out will pay far more attention to that faculty and their representative. Yes, I am calling for *a greater level of activism and involvement*. What this involvement means behaviorally is described below. But first let me address my limited interaction with the Board.

Interactions with the Board to Date I have now met, albeit briefly, all members of the Board. My overriding impression is that they are very deeply concerned about the serious damage being done to the university as a result of the protracted discussion of the "audit" and related matters. They clearly wish to move ahead, focusing first and foremost on the economic issues your vote said were paramount. While the Board as a whole may be more generous than others in their interpretation of the origin of some of the President's difficulties, their eyes are open. They, and the President, are aware consequential mistakes have been made, and I believe the Board will tolerate neither the recurrence of these mistakes nor their progeny. But, it is also abundantly clear that a clear majority of the Board sees in the President skills and abilities vital to our future prosperity as an institution. Very simply, these Board members are asking the faculty to make a good faith effort to help the President put the skills they see to use for the benefit of Western. My sense is if we do our part, they will hold the President accountable for doing his. *For the entire Western community, I am persuaded this is the best approach at this time.*



We also are beginning to focus "high level" attention on the economic security issue. President Meredith just announced to the Board that faculty salaries are his first priority in formulating next year's budget. At its October 29 meeting, the Board instructed the President to form a task force to determine the extent by which faculty/staff salaries are lagging behind our benchmarks. Particularly encouraging is that the President committed to the Board to be prepared to *present the findings together with a plan for redressing the problem at the next Board meeting in January*. Admittedly so far we still have only rhetoric, but *if the faculty is steadfast*, I believe in its formative phase is a serious, multi-year effort to finally make our salaries competitive.

The other issue I have discussed with Board Chairman Mercer is my committee assignment once I join the Board in January. The Board has three standing committees: executive, academic, and finance and investment. Historically, the faculty regent ends up on the academic committee. Since I believe resource allocation issues lies at the root of many of our concerns, I have asked to be assigned instead to the finance and investment committee. Of course, I indicated my interest in serving in an ex-officio capacity on the academic committee as well. I am pleased and encouraged to report that the Chairman, Burns Mercer was very receptive to this proposal. I believe his response reflects a sincere desire by this new Board to give faculty a real voice in the governance of the university.

Faculty Regent Advisory Committee As one means of ensuring that I properly represent you, I have asked several members of the faculty to work with me in an advisory capacity. My goal was to form a committee with great expertise about the workings of the Board and the university, a committee with a close hand on the pulse of their respective colleges, a committee of persons whose lead you would be reasonably inclined to follow, and a committee composed of persons who in their dealings with me will be candid, direct, and not engage in self-censorship. The members of this committee are:

Bill Buckman	(Ogden)	- a former regent
Mary Ellen Miller	(Potter)	- a former regent
Gene Evans	(Business)	- soon to be a former regent!
Sally Kuhlenschmidt	(CEBS)	- Faculty Senate Chair
Bart White	(Potter)	- AAUP President
Bob Pulsinelli	(Business)	
Connie Foster	(Library)	
Bob McKenzie	(CEBS)	
Blaine Ferrell	(Ogden)	

We will be jointly determining at our initial meetings in November exactly how we can best operate as a committee. Feel free to contact any of us now if you have any suggestions we should consider at our organizational meeting. In any event, please make use of these persons as an additional conduit for transmitting information to and from the Board.

Semi-Annual College Meetings Once each semester, I'd like to have an informal "rap session" in each college. I'll come prepared simply to listen to what you have to say, prepared to talk about what I see transpiring on the Board, prepared to explain what views I may have on any topic you wish, and prepared to solicit your views on issues with which I am struggling. Hopefully, your advisory committee representatives will help me arrange a suitable time and location for our first session. We'll let what transpires at the first sessions dictate location and format for our subsequent sessions.

We Lack Meaningful Data. As I indicated in my bid for faculty regent, I am convinced we need better data to drive our decision making and our lobbying efforts. I have long been unhappy with the absence of a systematic and timely procedure for gathering specific information about the nature and extent of the problems we individually and collectively encounter in



our work lives at Western. The occasional "opinion" questionnaires we complete on our administrators are of limited value. They are too narrow in scope, sorely devoid of behavioral specificity, untimely, and often ask questions which most of us have no real basis for answering. For example, how many of us have had any direct interaction with the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs? When a questionnaire about him is completed by 400 faculty members, only 40 of whom may have an informed opinion, the latter informed opinion is obscured by the responses of the rest of us. Furthermore, we as faculty are too far removed from the analyses, feedback, and ramifications, if any, flowing from this process. Accordingly, I am initiating the procedure described below. As you will see, *its value depends entirely on your taking the time to contribute to the data base, both now and in the future.*

Critical Incidents Methodology The mechanism is called the "Critical Incidents Method." This is a powerful strategy widely used by organizational researchers for systematically gathering specific information about the extent and nature of a broad array of organizational problems.

Attached is a single blank Critical Incidents Form. *I urge you to make copies of this blank form and place them in a file folder. Then, from now on, when an incident occurs, complete the form and drop it in campus mail to me.* If there are incidents that have occurred within the last year or two that you feel strongly about, feel free to complete a form on each of them and submit them now. Approximately 10 minutes is typically required to complete a form.

So what kind of incidents should you document? Literally any specific event about which you have specific and reliable knowledge that strikes you as an example of bad (or particularly good) performance or illustrative of a systemic problem (or strength) on campus. Any event is appropriate if you believe it is telling about the (in)effectiveness or (in)efficiency with which a specific person, office, group, department, etc. is discharging his/her/its responsibilities. Just to give you a better sense of what a critical incident is, on the next page I have listed some hypothetical examples of a range of incidents that are appropriate.

Although a single incident is informative, the real strength of the technique rests on the convergence of information from multiple independent sources. With a faculty of nearly 600, if half of you each submits just five incidents over the next semester, we'll have collected roughly 1500 specific incidents. This will provide an extraordinarily useful data base comprised of specific incidents from which we can identify patterns and document problems. Of course, we are not limited to a one semester data collection effort. My expectation is that the gathering of critical incidents will become an ongoing process.

Initially, together with a research assistant, I will assume responsibility for receiving, tabulating, and content analyzing the incidents. In case further information is needed, it is helpful, though not essential, for you to identify yourself as the author of an incident. *In no instance will your identity be disclosed without your written permission.* At least once each semester, I will prepare a summary of the results, including submission rates by college. Problem areas that have been identified by many incidents will be described. This information will be passed to you either through the Senate Newsletter or in a separate mailing from me. Though I view this as a faculty initiative, the faculty, the administration, and the Board will be granted full access to the data once names, where provided, are removed from the critical incident forms.

My experience is that this process can provide us with enormously useful information, information needed to drive policy decisions throughout the university. Its viability however depends entirely on your commitment to the process. *You must be willing, now and in the future, to complete and submit the critical incident forms.*

I'll try to communicate with you in a similar, although hopefully less lengthy fashion after each Board meeting. Feel free to contact me at 745-4420 at any time. Again, thanks for your support during the election. I'll make every effort to live up to your expectations.

**SUBMIT THOSE CRITICAL INCIDENTS, NOW AND IN THE FUTURE!**



## EXAMPLES OF NON-BEHAVIORAL AND *BEHAVIORALLY SPECIFIC* INCIDENTS

So, what kind of "incidents" should you document? Literally any specific event that strikes you as an example of either good or bad performance in carrying out the business of the university. Below are a few examples of statements that lacks behavioral specificity (NB) and thus should be avoided. Each is followed in italics by behaviorally specific (B) incidents that might be appropriate.

NB1) I don't have the supplies I need to teach my class.

*B1) I was unable to hand out to my class a "cram sheet" for an exam because of limitations on my departmental printing budget.*

NB2) Its clear the physical plant overstaffs tasks with lazy workers.

*B2) I saw three physical plant personnel standing around watching a fourth person hang a door.*

NB3) Due to lack of funds, I'm becoming less professionally involved.

*B3) I canceled a trip to a professional meeting due to lack of funds.*

NB4) My department head is a good people and resource manager.

*B4) My department head called me into his office to pass along a compliment he received from a student about my teaching.*

NB5) We don't have enough instructors to cover our classes.

*B5) A student reported to me that he won't graduate as planned because the one course he needs is not offered next semester.*

NB6) I am increasingly being priced out of university life.

*B6) I stopped swimming because I didn't feel I could afford to pay for access to the Preston Center pool.*

NB7) Financial pressures are forcing me to chase a buck rather than focus on my research interests.

*B7) Rather than work on getting a paper submitted for publication, I decided to supplement my income by conducting training sessions for a local company.*

NB8) Running contracts through the university is not worth the hassle.

*B8) I chose not to run a grant or contract through the university because the university would not permit me to charge a competitive rate for my time.*

NB9) My dean cannot be trusted.

*NB9) My dean told me he would support my sabbatical application and later I learned he actually opposed it.*



## CRITICAL INCIDENT FORM

Your Name (optional) \_\_\_\_\_ College \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Department (optional) \_\_\_\_\_ Approximate Date of Incident \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

In the space below, describe the incident (please be behaviorally specific):

What were the circumstances that led up to this incident?

What was it that made the behavior in this incident so effective or ineffective?

Place an "X" on the scale below to indicate the effectiveness of the behavior in this critical incident:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely Ineffective	Very Ineffective	Ineffective	Effective	Very Effective	Extremely Effective

(Mail to: Ray Mendel, TCP 267, Campus)